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Yugoslavia: A Growing Albanian MinoritySUMMARY

Rapid population growth among the Albanians, Yugoslavia's poorest and most alienated major ethnic group, is sharpening regional tensions and eroding the regime's long-term ability to maintain stability. The demographic shift is most dramatic in Kosovo, a heavily Albanian province within the Serbian Republic that was the scene of serious Albanian disorders in 1981. But political, economic, and security problems also loom in several other regions with growing Albanian populations. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] East European Division, Office of European Analysis. Comments and questions are welcome and should be addressed to [redacted] Chief, East European Division, Office of European Analysis, [redacted]

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Yugoslavia: Regional and Ethnic Makeup, 1981



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Demographic Shift

Yugoslavia's 1.9 million Albanians are its largest non-Slavic minority, inhabiting several regions bordering on Albania. Some 70 percent live in Serbia's autonomous province of Kosovo, a region once the core of Serbia's medieval kingdom and which still evokes strong emotions among Serbs. The remainder live mainly in Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia proper. The Albanians suffer the country's highest rates of illiteracy, unemployment, and other earmarks of underdevelopment. They are heartily disliked by the Serbs and regarded with contempt or indifference by most other Yugoslav ethnic groups; they, in turn, strongly resent Serbs and other nearby Slavic groups. Yugoslavia's Albanians, numbering about two-thirds of the population of Albania itself, constitute proportionally Europe's largest divided population.

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The numbers of Yugoslavia's Albanians have increased steadily over the years. With the highest birthrate of any major European ethnic group, the Albanians have moved up from a 3.7-percent share of Yugoslavia's total population in 1921 to a roughly 8-percent share today.¹ They now outnumber three of the country's major Slavic groups--the Macedonians, Montenegrins, and Slovenes--and are behind only the Serbs, Croats, and Slavic Muslims. With the exception of the Muslims, who are a strong minority group in Bosnia-Herzegovina, they are the only major ethnic group with no republic of their own.

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The demographic shift in favor of the Albanians has been most dramatic and politically inflammatory in Kosovo, a region under tight Serbian control until 1966 when Tito ousted his hardline Serb security chief, Aleksandar Rankovic. The proportion of Albanians in Kosovo has edged up from 67 percent to 77.4 percent from 1961 to 1981, the date of the last official census. The number of Serbs and Montenegrins in the same period has dropped from 27.5 percent to under 15 percent. The shift is due both to the high natural increase in the Albanian population--in recent years more than seven times that of Serbs and twice that of less numerous Montenegrins--and to a net outflow of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo.

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The demographic shift is likely to continue and possibly accelerate. By 1991, the year of the next census, the Albanians will probably account for 80-84 percent of Kosovo's population while the Serb-Montenegrin share will probably drop to 8-12 percent. The actual percentages will depend on birthrates, which are subject to change, and the pace of the Serb-Montenegrin emigration. Although information on emigration provided by Kosovo and Serbian authorities is often contradictory and politically biased, the data suggests the net Serb-Montenegrin outflow is now running between 3,000 and 6,000 persons a year.

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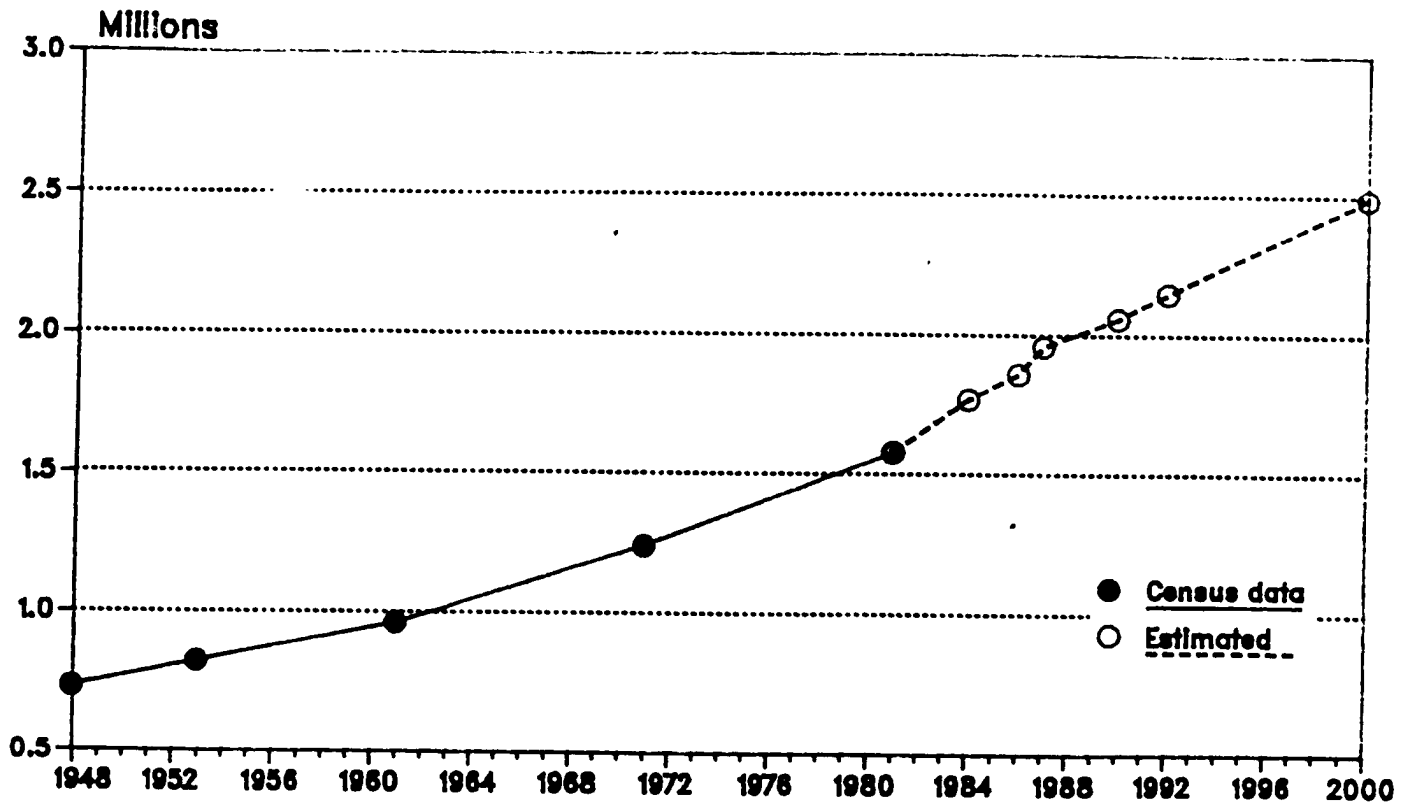
Albanians have also made population gains in other regions. In Macedonia, they have moved up from 17 to 20 percent of the population from

¹ Data in this article is drawn from Yugoslav censuses and other official, open sources.

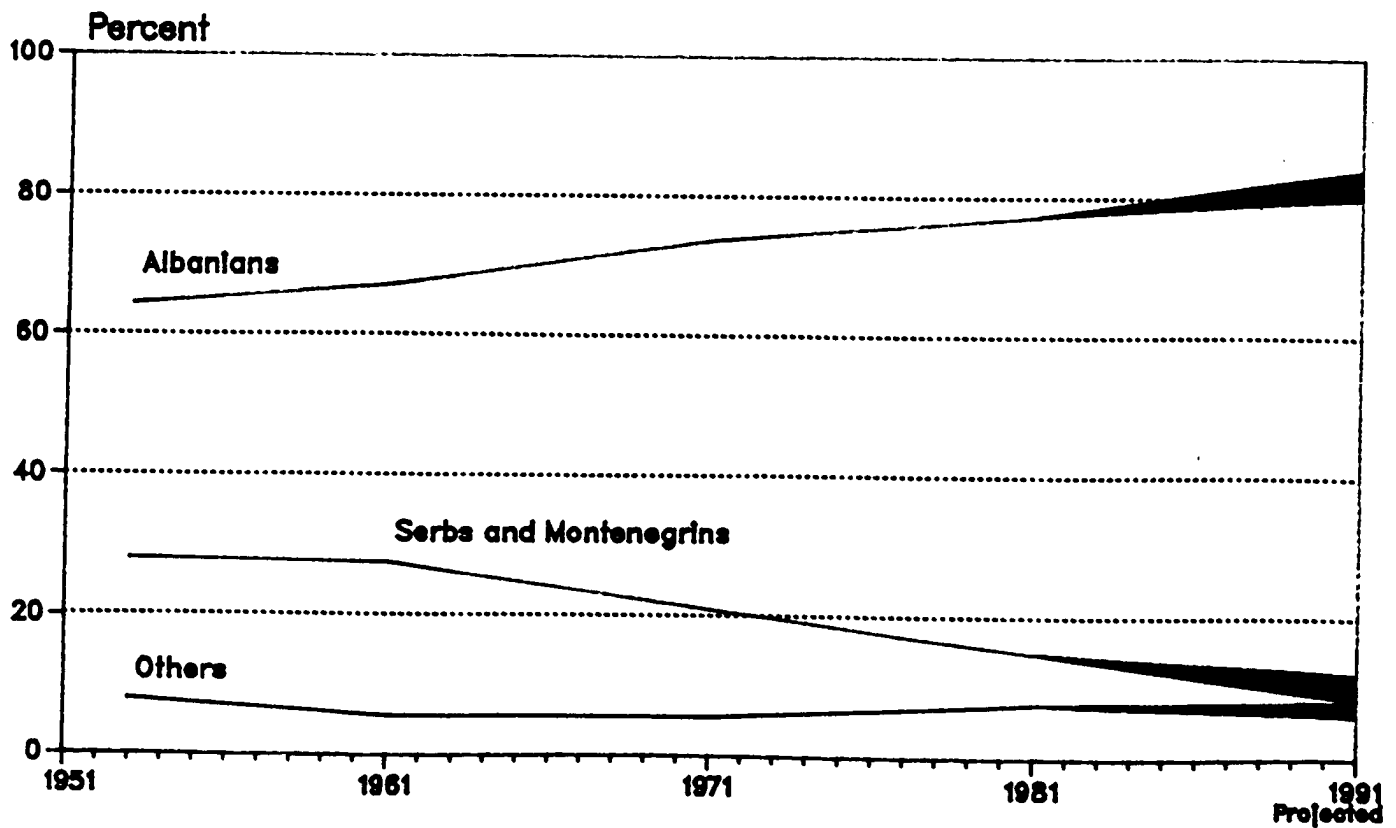
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Kosovo Population



Kosovo Population by Nationality, 1953-91



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1971 to 1981. Albanian population growth rates have been about twice those of the Macedonians, and Yugoslav media report an inflow of hundreds of Albanians yearly from Kosovo into Macedonia. [REDACTED]

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The Albanian population has been more stable in Montenegro and in Serbia proper, according to official statistics, numbering only 6.5 and 1.3 percent of those regions' total populations respectively in 1981. But Montenegrin leaders have hinted at growing anti-Albanian sentiment. In Serbia, an exodus of Serbs from counties near the border with Kosovo has prompted incendiary articles in the Serbian press. Even more foreboding, the Serbian leadership has acknowledged a rash of attacks by Serbs on Albanian homes and shops in recent months in Serbia proper. [REDACTED]

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Political Representation

Despite their demographic gains, Albanians have had a mixed record in securing political representation in line with their numbers. The biggest progress has been registered in Kosovo. But the sledding is still tough in Macedonia and Montenegro, where other ethnic groups dominate the political machinery. [REDACTED]

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In Kosovo, despite the Serbian-inspired crackdown after the 1981 riots, the Albanians have succeeded in reversing decades of Serb-Montenegrin overrepresentation in the political apparatus. Albanians make up 77 percent of the Kosovo Assembly and 71 and 80 percent respectively of the Kosovo delegations on the Yugoslav and Serbian Assemblies, a Kosovo paper reported in June 1982. The figures are in line with their 77.5 percent of the local population about that time. With a two-thirds share of Kosovo party membership, they make up over two-thirds of the province's party Central Committee, a ratio largely unaffected by the sweeping turnover in that body in 1982. And Albanians have solid representation in top provincial judicial, security, and governmental posts. [REDACTED]

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In Macedonia, however, where they register 20 percent of the population, Albanians hold no top judicial or security posts, and are underrepresented in high republican party and governmental jobs. In Montenegro, where they number 6.5 percent of the population, Albanians have representatives on the republic's top governmental councils but a tiny share on the party Central Committee and no top judicial or security posts. [REDACTED]

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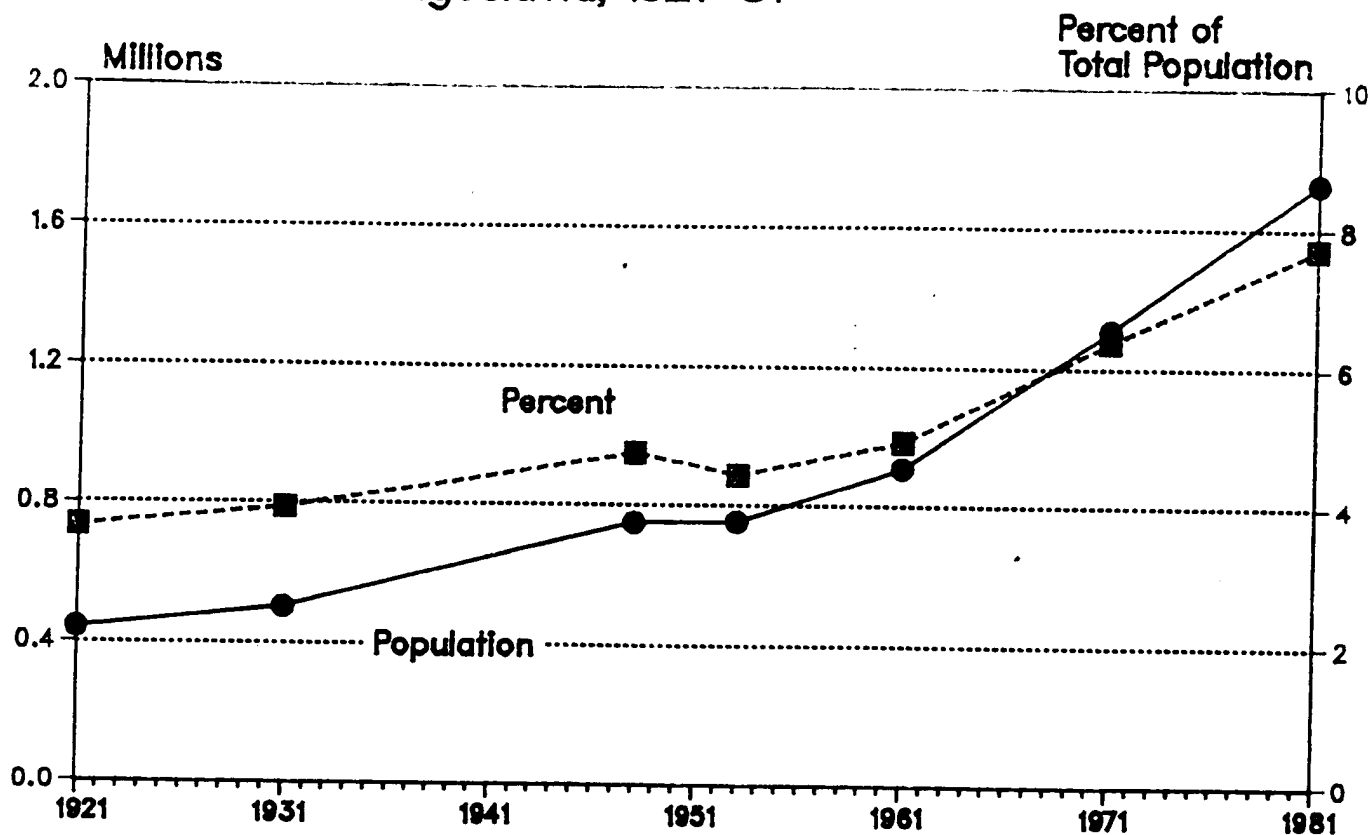
Youth Problems Ahead

The age structure of Kosovo's population gives non-Albanian Yugoslavs grounds for demographic, economic, and security concerns. The province has proportionally the country's youngest population, with two-thirds of the inhabitants under age 30 in 1981. The large and growing number of Albanians entering peak childbearing age virtually assures fast Albanian population growth into the next century, even if birthrates decline. Both federal and Kosovo projections foresee Kosovo's population rising at or above current rates. [REDACTED]

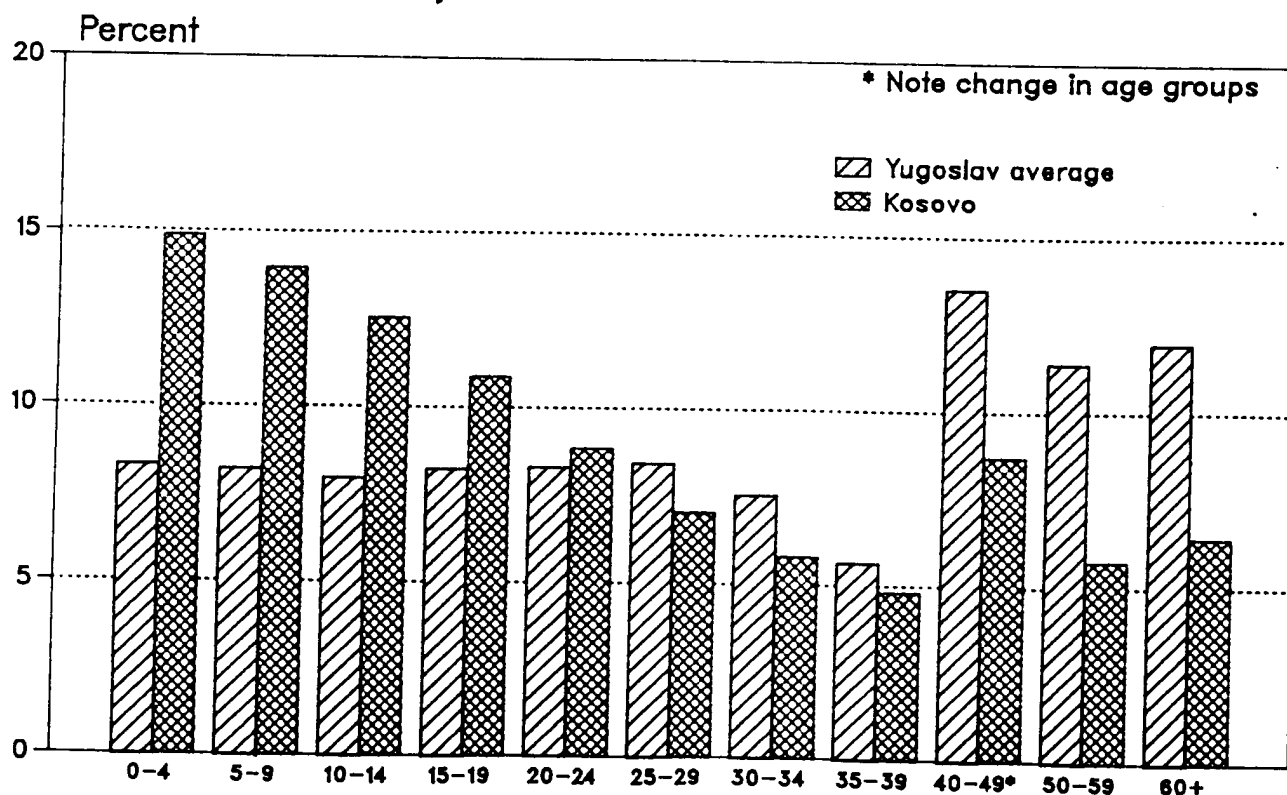
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Albanians in Yugoslavia, 1921-81



Yugoslavian Population by Age Groups, 1981



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Prospects look dim for major birth control efforts any time soon, despite scarcely concealed pressure on Kosovo Albanian authorities from Serbs and other groups. The leading Kosovo Serb paper in late May, for instance, declared that the province's high population increase is a problem that "cannot be bypassed" and charged that "Albanian nationalists and irredentists...support as high a birthrate as possible." Meanwhile, neighboring Albania sets an unhealthy example in the eyes of Serbs, promoting fast population growth to increase the country's economic and political potential. [REDACTED]

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Even more foreboding are the economic and security implications of the age structure. The 1981 disturbances took place at a time when 300,000 Kosovars, 20 percent of the province's population, entered the 15-24 year age bracket. By 1991 some 420,000 will be in this group. This bracket has the highest propensity to vent nationalist feelings, as witnessed by the disproportionate number of young people arrested during and since the 1981 outbreaks. It also faces the worst youth unemployment in the country. [REDACTED]

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Few prospects exist for significant changes in the job picture unless Kosovo economic growth far outstrips the province's 3 percent annual population rise, not likely any time soon. Although Kosovo's 1982 gross social product (roughly equivalent to GNP) was 3.5 times the 1962 level, per capita gross social product only doubled because of the population growth. Moreover, Kosovo lost ground to other regions in the same period in per capital social product, falling from 33.8 to 28.5 percent of the national average and to less than one-sixth that of Slovenia, the most developed republic. [REDACTED]

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Prospects

Yugoslavia's shifting demographic balance will probably continue to fuel political, ethnic, and economic tensions for the foreseeable future. The Serbian leadership, publicly committed to reasserting political control over Kosovo, will likely find it increasingly hard to exert its influence as the Albanian population mounts and Serbs and Montenegrins flee. The Macedonian leadership may face growing troubles as western Macedonia becomes increasingly Albanian. And in Serbia proper, where a small Albanian minority is exposed to an increasingly frustrated and nationalistic Serb population, ethnic strife may intensify. [REDACTED]

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The more distant northern republics will likely give Serbia little comfort, as they share with the Albanians a fear of Serbian nationalism. Yet they too appear to share Serbian concerns that to grant the Albanians a republic of their own could stimulate Albanian nationalism and destabilize the post-Tito order. And if the security situation again deteriorates, as it did in Kosovo four years ago, they may be forced to accept a new Serbian-led crackdown as an alternative to broader unrest. [REDACTED]

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